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SUBJECT: ITALY WORKING THROUGH EU ON VENEZUELA NGO LAW

REF: STATE 97547

Classified By: Acting Political Minister Counselor Jonathan R. Cohen for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) June 19 Poloff delivered reftel demarche to Acting South America Office Director Paolo Campanini, urging Italy to communicate its concerns with the Venezuelan NGO bill to Caracas. Poloff noted that the draft legislation was vague and would give great discretion to the GOV in hindering NGO operations, thereby weakening civil society. Campanini responded that Italy had been following the issue and was concerned about the potential effects of the law. The European Union had delivered a demarche to Venezuela at the ministerial level, according to Campanini, voicing its concerns with the bill. Campanini said that the response from the minister was somewhat comforting, in that he told the EU that the law would not restrict the liberty of NGOs.

¶2. (C) Noting that some of the most worrying aspects of the legislation had been softened, Campanini nevertheless highlighted the need to continue to pay close attention. He said that although Italy has not taken steps to address the issue bilaterally with Venezuela, the GOI has been involved in discussions within the EU Committee on Latin America (COLAT). According to Campanini, the GOI thought an overly aggressive approach would not be productive, preferring to point out some "causes for concern" stemming from the legislation. Poloff noted that European opinion carried weight in Caracas and a message directly from the GOI could be helpful.
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